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USAID FOR DCHA SUDAN TEAM, AFR/SP
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SUBJECT: SUDAN - NEEDS ASSESSMENTS IN KASSALA STATE

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Summary

¶1. (U) From November 5 to 9, the UN led a Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) to examine the food and non-food aid needs of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees in Kassala State, eastern Sudan. For the first time, the JAM was carried out in conjunction with the UN World Food Program (WFP)-led Annual Needs Assessment (ANA), which is conducted throughout Sudan to assess internally displaced persons (IDP) and vulnerable populations' food security requirements. By utilizing the ANA-designed questionnaire in refugee camps, WFP and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) aim to improve the quality and accuracy of information collected on the needs of refugees, IDPs, and other vulnerable populations. From November 1 to 18, the ANA and JAM teams visited IDP and refugee camps as well as crop production areas throughout Kassala State. A USAID staff member participating in the JAM reported that one of the biggest challenges is transitioning relief activities to recovery, rehabilitation, and sustainable development programs for refugees. Detailed findings from the ANA and JAM are expected to be reported in the coming weeks.

¶2. (SBU) The Government of Eritrea's decision in early November to cancel permits for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) providing assistance to northeast Sudan - the area formerly controlled by the Eastern Front opposition group - cross-border from Eritrea has increased concerns about humanitarian access and the ability of assistance programs to continue. However, on November 20, USAID partner International Rescue Committee (IRC) received authorization from the Wali (governor) of Kassala State to begin operations in Hamashkorieb locality, auguring an easing of restrictions for humanitarian organizations seeking access to the area from within Sudan. End summary.

JAM in Kassala State

¶3. (U) The JAM for the refugee camps in Kassala - jointly carried out by WFP, UNHCR, and the Government of National Unity's (GNU) Commission for Refugees (COR) - was last conducted in December 2004,

when agencies agreed that the next one should take place in May 2006. However, the assessment mission was postponed to November 2006 to obtain post-harvest information and synchronize the timing with WFP's ANA process. The USAID/Sudan food security and agriculture specialist participated in the JAM from November 7 to 9.

The JAM's objectives include: analyze the food security situation and determine food and non-food aid requirements for 2007; assess the health and nutrition status of children, pregnant and lactating mothers, and the sick and elderly; review the performance, achievements, and constraints of food aid programs and basic services provided; and identify opportunities available and constraints for refugees to enhance levels of self-reliance. The mission included visits to refugee camps and local markets, interviews of refugees, and meetings with camp management staff and GNU officials.

14. (U) UNHCR estimates that the 12 camps in Kassala, Gedarif, Sinnar, and Gezira states have a total population of approximately 95,000 refugees, some of whom have been in Sudan for more than 30 years. The refugees live in three different types of camps:

A) Reception camps, where refugees first arrive and their status is determined before being moved to other camps;

B) Wage-based camps are located primarily in agricultural areas where refugees are expected to obtain employment as laborers in the rain-fed mechanized agricultural schemes; and

C) Land-based camps, where refugees have been allocated between 5 and 10 feddans of agricultural land for cultivation (1 feddan is equivalent to 1.03 acres). The main crop grown is sorghum, which is the staple food crop of the host communities. During good years, some sesame is grown as a cash crop.

15. (U) UNHCR and COR manage and run all the camps in the four states, providing basic services, including health, water and sanitation, education, and protection. WFP distributes food assistance to 85,000 refugees under Emergency Operation (EMOP)

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16. (SBU) The USAID/Sudan food security and agriculture specialist noted that one of the biggest challenges is transitioning relief activities to recovery, rehabilitation, and sustainable development programs for refugees. Most of the refugees have received food assistance for many years - some for more than 30 years - resulting in dependency on external humanitarian assistance. The wage- and land-based camps were established as a means of supporting refugees in reaching self-reliance. However, these programs need to be strengthened to allow refugee households to meet their food and income needs. In addition, the USAID/Sudan food security and agriculture specialist recommends that WFP discontinue general food distributions and focus on targeted activities, such as food-for-work, food-for-recovery, and school feeding. Special attention should be given to vulnerable populations, including the elderly and chronically ill, households living with HIV/AIDS, and orphan-headed households.

UNHCR 2007 Plan

17. (SBU) During a meeting with JAM participants, UNHCR highlighted the main points of the UNHCR 2007 Plan for refugees in eastern Sudan. The plan includes the following: a) advocate for legal reform to allow refugees and asylum seekers to have proper documentation; b) advocate for regularization of refugees' status, rights to movements, and residence, particularly for those living in urban settings; c) enhance refugees access to self reliance; d) resettle refugees to a third country for those who qualify; and e) repatriate refugees, especially given the recent opening of the Sudanese-Eritrean border and the normalization of relations between both countries. (Comment: JAM participants criticized the plan's focus on resettlement to a third country and repatriation to Eritrea instead of the option to integrate refugees into the communities

where some have lived for more than 30 years. In the last several years, the number of repatriated and resettled refugees has not exceeded 10 percent of the caseload. Given this small percentage, UNHCR should consider and engage the GNU, refugees, and local authorities in discussions on the potential for options for integration of some of the 90 percent of refugees who are not repatriated or resettled. End comment.)

Access to Hamashkorieb

18. (SBU) On November 8, the USAID food security and agriculture specialist and the WFP coordinator for Center, East, and Three Areas (CETA) met with the HAC commissioner for Kassala State to discuss concerns about humanitarian access to Hamashkorieb. (Note: In early November, the Eritrean Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare notified USAID partners providing assistance in eastern Sudan that the NGOs' travel, resident, and work permits in Eritrea would expire by mid-month. The decision effectively halts the organizations' cross-border programs, which provide food assistance to populations in the area of northeast Sudan formerly controlled by the Eastern Front opposition group. Eritrean authorities justified this action by noting that the signing of the Eritrean-brokered Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) between the Eastern Front and the GNU meant that cross-border operations from Eritrea were no longer necessary. However, the GNU has not yet permitted humanitarian agencies to access the area from within Sudan. End note.) In response to USAID and WFP questions about the GNU's plans to ease restrictions on access to Hamashkorieb, the HAC commissioner indicated that the policy of the Kassala State Government is to work through "concerned" entities to resolve access problems throughout the state. The commissioner called for more donor and UN assistance to eastern Sudan in support of the ESPA.

19. (U) On November 20, USAID partner IRC received written authorization from the Wali's office in Kassala allowing the NGO to move to Hamashkorieb and provide assistance in the area. IRC plans to begin activities in the near future.

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